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“¡VIVA LA RAZA!”

**A
Communist
View on**

CHICANO LIBERATION

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

As part of the on-going discussion in the Communist Party, U.S.A. of the struggle for Chicano liberation, and in preparation of a basic resolution on the subject, a report was delivered to the National Committee of the Communist Party by Luciano Valencio Silva.

The National Committee approved the general approach of the report and called for continued discussion, research and study on the path to Mexican-American liberation, especially in regard to the theoretical questions involved in the application of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the national question to the specific situation.

That report is reprinted here as a significant contribution to the continuing discussion in the Communist Party and in many other circles of the road to Chicano liberation.



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“¡VIVA LA RAZA!”—

A Communist View on Chicano Liberation

Comrades: As we begin the discussion today on the finalization of our resolution on Mexican work, it might be useful to review some of our party's past work on this question. As I heard many of your comments at our last convention, one would think that we were about to engage in a new field of work, whereas the contrary is true.

Our party has a long and largely commendable record of work with and among the Mexican people; beginning in the early '30s when we consolidated our organization after the splitting factionalism that characterized the 1920s. During the '30s our comrades worked valiantly in the mines and fields of the West and Southwest, and participated creditably in the mining strikes in New Mexico and in the agricultural strikes in the Imperial Valley and throughout much of California which marked the very beginning of the organization of the agricultural workers.

In this regard, it might be noted that the present organization of agricultural workers has its direct roots in the strikes and efforts that we helped to lead in the 1930s, and in fact many of the songs and slogans of La Huelga are taken from that period. Our organization participated also in the field of protection of the foreign born when the Mexican community was being expatriated from the United States. Well over a million American citizens—children and spouses of Mexicans residing in the U.S.—were expelled from the country together with their Mexican parents, husbands and wives in order to get them off the relief rolls. This was in the middle of the great depression.

In the 1940s and in the early 1950s we participated in

the developing urban community organizations and began a serious study of the character of the Mexican people in the Southwest. The study led us very clearly to the conclusion that the national character of the Mexican people in the Southwest is that of a national minority, a people seeking to establish its own clearly defined identity. It is clear that the Chicano people constitute a historically developed community with a common psychology and a community of interest; that we have a common geography and history, and a common language. We had a common economy, but the rapid expansion of the economy of the U.S. itself quickly destroyed the self-subsistent agricultural economy that characterized the area at the time of the American conquest. We also made it very clear that this national minority was created as a result of a military conquest and of an illegal occupation of the area. A national minority is maintained in the U.S. through borders that were militarily imposed and that are militarily maintained.

The Mexican people in the U.S. and in Mexico do not recognize the borders. A vast force of Border Control and Immigration agents is required to keep out the workers from the Mexican side as well as to control the flow of the labor force within the U.S. This occurs throughout the West Coast and Southwest, and nationally, as the migrant labor forces have spread to the northern border states, including Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and even to such southern states as Florida.

As we developed the characterization of the Mexican people as a vast national minority we constructed a series of demands for the mass movement of the Mexican people. That these demands were based on a correct theory and on a correct characterization is attested to by the fact that they are still the demands of the Mexican people today. When the accommodationists in the Mexican community were building such groups as the Community Service Organizations, League of United Latin American Citizens and

others, we developed the concept of the Mexican-American and we struggled within the mass movement for national identification. We also developed a struggle for the preservation of the language, for a pride in our history and our culture and for demands on the school structure to stop the systematic annihilation of the history, of the language, of the culture of the Mexican people. The struggle was translated successfully to the mass movement and it remains its property today. It can be seen in the manifesto of Aztlán, in the demands of the striking students and at many other levels.

The problem with our work then in the '40s and early '50s, as now, was that our work on the Mexican question was always regionally centered, and so when our organization was strong in the West and Southwest our work in the Mexican area took on great importance. Where we have failed is in understanding and implementing the fact that the work on the Mexican question cannot be confined to one region but must be regarded as a national matter. We have failed to understand the national implications of the Mexican question, the relationship of forces within the Mexican community throughout the U.S., and the potential for these forces constituting a decisive element in the fight against imperialism. These are national implications and required a national concentrated approach. We not only developed, it should be said, a correct evaluation of the Mexican people but we also are developing now, together with the mass movement, the consequent concept that a national minority must have the right to determine its own destiny. For us, national determination should mean that the forms and the methods must be found for the Mexican people to work out their own destiny.

As Lenin always pointed out, this is a slogan that pushes forward the mass movement and the implementation of the slogan depends on the circumstances prevailing at the time that socialism is established, when its practical imple-

mentation becomes a historical possibility. It might be well for us to remember that we not only developed theories and approaches to the Mexican people, but that we involved ourselves and were instrumental in helping create the first national Mexican organization. This was the Asociación Nacional México-Americano (ANMA), and through it we developed the policies and programs that become a part of the content and of the direction of the Mexican people's efforts toward full equality.

ANMA was the first national organization that defined the national character of the Mexican people and developed the bi-culture concept of the Mexican-American. This concept was adopted by the national mass movement and was the descriptive term for the Mexican people in the U.S. until very recently. ANMA established viable organizations in California, New Mexico, Colorado and Texas. It illustrated that what had been said by the accommodationists about the diverse and heterogeneous character of the Mexican people and their varied identity would not and did not prevent the people from organizing in a national organization to find their own national identity. ANMA was crushed in a few years, the victim of the McCarthy period, of the McCarthyist labor fakery who were sent by the AFL-CIO deliberately to redbait and crush it, and a victim of our own mistakes in dealing with McCarthyism.

The demands that were put forth by ANMA and by our cadre in the various community organizations on the teaching of the history, of the language, of the culture; on a pride in our own identity; on housing and on welfare, became the advanced demands of the '50s. These demands, which are still largely unfulfilled, continue to be the main content of the struggle today. We must recognize now, as we recognized in the '50s, that a national minority is always under attack by the national bourgeoisie who seek to destroy its identity, its background, and to erase its history from the minds of its men and women. The

Mexican people have fought valiantly against the destruction of their heritage. The survival of this heritage of the Spanish language against this national attack is a testimony to the strength and stability of the people.

Only in the past few years has there been some minimal concession to some of these demands as a result of unprecedented mass struggle.

As for the class composition of the Mexican people, we have repeatedly explained to the party and to the mass organizations that the Mexican people are the main element of the working class in the Southwest, in Southern California, and in Southern Texas. They constitute an important factor in the working class in such urban centers as Chicago, Pittsburgh and Detroit. As the key factor in the working class they form an important and indispensable ingredient in forging a coalition against imperialism. But any approach to this important and indispensable element can never succeed unless we understand the national character of this component of a class. This vast national minority forms a working class that is economically and ethnically tied to Northern Mexico. The border that divides Mexico from the U.S. is maintained by the force of military might but it is not recognized by the working class that lives on either side of that border.

The border is maintained only by the enforcement of the immigration laws of this country, which are the most vicious and the most contrary to the democratic traditions of this country of any set of laws which govern any phase of our lives. These laws permit arrest without warrant, search and seizure without authorization, detention and summary deportation. There is no statute of limitations against applicability of these laws, which makes the legal admission into the U.S. of people from Mexico almost impossible.

This creates a situation in which, on one side of the border the workers in Northern Mexico suffer from 37 to 50% unemployment, while by contrast in the U.S.

there is relatively full employment. The economic pressure thus created results in literally millions of "illegals," people without documents, coming into the U.S. to work and support their families. Once here they are especially exploited by the employers and used to prevent union organization. In one plant recently, when a union went into negotiations, the employer picked up the phone and called the Immigration Service and several members of the negotiating committee and 30 workers were immediately deported to Mexico.

This process is duplicated dozens of times a month in plants throughout the Southwest. Literally hundreds of thousands of workers live in daily fear of being apprehended and forcibly removed from the country. The atmosphere of fear and illegality that is imposed on the people from Mexico creates a bonanza situation for the exploitative employers.

It is interesting to note that a new division of the National Maritime Union recently went into organizing these small industries where Mexican people without documents are employed: assembly, sub-assembly, electronics, garment, laundry and other service industries. It immediately ran into the immigration problem and found that it could not organize unless it began to defend the people against the immigration authorities. They held a national meeting with the Commissioner of Immigration to demand a change in the laws and regulations. These demands are strongly approved and supported by the Mexican mass movement.

They are: to allow all workers who have been in the United States one year to remain at their jobs; to allow all people who are processing their papers to remain in the U.S. pending the issuance of their visas; and that as a condition for these privileges, the persons be required to begin processing of their documents immediately.

To understand the current situation of the Mexican people within the United States it will be useful to review

the status of some of the movements that are sweeping the land and changing the thinking and the lives of the Mexican people.

As in the rest of the country, the most dynamic and important part of the movement of the Mexican people today are the youth, who in our country today constitute more than 50% of the population. Among Chicanos the youth constitute an even larger part of the population than among Anglos. It is the youth who developed the first revolutionary congress to take place in the Mexican community, and this occurred in Denver last summer (1969). The second session of this congress was held in Denver in the latter part of March 1970, and drew more than 3,000 participants from throughout the country, from the universities, high schools and the streets; twice as many as the number who participated in 1969. It is the youth who are talking about and seeking alternatives to the capitalist system. Their discontent is evidenced in every Mexican community in the country and they are pursuing both immediate and long-range demands on the system.

Mexican youth on the West Coast and throughout the Southwest, last spring and on the 16th of September last fall, staged massive school strikes. In Los Angeles alone 15,000 youth struck simultaneously. This strike was essentially uncoordinated, and was almost totally unexpected by their adult teachers and parents. These strikes had one thing in common: they demanded an end to the present system of education; they demanded the beginning of Chicano education, of education in the Spanish language, of education in the history and in the culture of their people; they demanded an end to the 50% so-called "drop-outs," who are actually school rejects, called "push-outs" by many in the Spanish-speaking communities.

The rejection of the Chicano student begins from the time that he enters school. He is confronted by an educational system that derides his language and his culture, that punishes him for speaking Spanish on the school

grounds and demands that he begin studying subject matter in the English language whether he knows it or not. This creates a block to all learning in most of the Mexican students and in many cases makes them marginal both to the Anglo culture that seeks to impose itself on them, and to their Mexican heritage which they are never taught.

The Chicano students want adequate school plants, smaller classes, and better qualified teachers. It used to be said that the Mexican youth (and many of us believed it) were not motivated to learn, and yet it is these youth who have put forward the most advanced demands in the education field. These demands go beyond those ever dreamed of by the adults who supposedly were to supervise and teach them; much less by the members who make up the Boards of Education.

The youth have also been very active in seeking out national identity for the Mexican people, for it is they who have promulgated such terms as "El Continente de Bronce," the continent of bronze; "La Tierra de Aztlán", the land of the Aztecs to the North; "La Raza Nueva," the new race; and "Chicano," which is a derivative of Mexican. But, as one youth said, "it is more than a people, man, Chicano is a state of mind; it is a movement." It is the youth who have raised the demand for self-identity to a new and higher level by projecting the concept of the nation of Aztlán, which underscores the common identity of the people of the Southwest with those of (Northern) Mexico.

Side by side with the militancy of the youth there continues the struggle of the farm workers to organize themselves. Basic to this is the 5-year struggle in the grape fields of California, which has now spread to workers in other crops and in other states. The struggle has served as an inspiration and as a unifying principle to the Mexican people as a whole, but it has done more than that, as important as that is. The struggle of the farm workers has served to awaken labor to its potential and has

reminded labor of its forgotten commitments. Further, it can also be said that the struggle of the farm workers is more than a union, it is a mass movement. In addition, the farm labor movement has helped to infuse the Chicano Liberation movement with a class concept while bringing to the campesinos a recognition of the necessary unity between farm and city workers—as well as unity with Blacks and Anglos who are also among those who are oppressed.

I mentioned as another part of the labor struggle the interest of the NMU in the Mexican community; that this interest reflects the beginnings of an awakening by the labor movement to the existence of the Mexican community and its potential. This general awakening is seen in the establishment of community unions in the Mexican barrios by the UAW and now by the Alliance for Labor Action (ALA). The establishment of the Mexican American Labor Council by the Los Angeles AFL-CIO was an initial indication of this awakening some years ago. However, the organization of the growing number of rank-and-file controlled Chicano caucuses in the labor movement has helped bring about a new level of understanding and response within the labor movement. The response of the labor movement as a whole, however, remains woefully inadequate.

On the electoral front the Mexican people continue their long and unequalled struggle against the exclusion of our community from the body politic. In California there is one Assemblyman, no State Senator, one Congressman; and there is no Mexican-American in any important elective position in the entire city of Los Angeles, which is the 4th largest in Mexican population in the world. This struggle necessarily continues mainly within the Democratic Party, because of the overwhelming participation in the Mexican community in that particular organization. However, the organization that the Mexican-American people have set up to continue the struggle was,

significantly, established as a non-partisan organization which is prepared to run its own candidates and to seek the endorsement of any political party, including minority parties.

Another aspect of the Chicano movement in the U.S. is a growing realization of our solidarity with the Indian people. As one Indian said, when questioned about the Tijerina movement on one of the *Les Crane* shows: "when the Mexican people came, they lived with us, they married our women and we married their women. When you Anglos come to this land you raped our women and killed our children, you committed genocide as you are doing in Vietnam."

To us, "La Raza" includes the Indians, the Central Americans, the South Americans, the Puerto Ricans. It is no accident that when the "Católicos Por La Raza" in Los Angeles last Christmas Eve marched on the three million dollar Cathedral on Wilshire Boulevard to protest this huge expenditure in disregard of the needs of the people, they were joined on their second demonstration by Bishop Antulio Parrilla Bonilla from Puerto Rico who said Mass for the demonstrators outside the Cathedral. The Bishop had just visited and been received by the Farm Workers Union. This is the meaning of "La Raza."

To all this the bourgeoisie has not remained silent. It has launched a national attack on the movement of the Mexican people, from Texas to New Mexico to California, from San Francisco to Los Angeles to San Antonio. There are the indictments of the Los Angeles 15, for supposedly helping the children to formulate demands for better education—"Conspiracy to Disturb the Peace." There are the indictments against the Biltmore 8, for their challenge to a conference called by Governor Reagan on Chicano education and presumably disrupting the conference. There are "Los 7 de La Raza" who were first attacked and then arrested by the San Francisco police. And, of course, one cannot speak of oppression without speaking of Reies

Lopez Tijerina, the leader of the struggle for the return of the New Mexico Land Grants. But more than a leader for the return of the stolen land, Reies Lopez Tijerina is a leader of the peoples' struggle for an identity, for national self-determination for the Mexican people to solve their own problems and lead their own destiny. This repression has been met by the organization of defense funds, which is still inadequate and in which we must play a more active part.

The experience that we in the party have acquired over the years in the field of political defense has served the movement in general, in the fightback against the attack of the Government. In Los Angeles, where the political defense of deportees has an especially long history, the Committee for the Defense of the Bill of Rights there was able to assist in the development of a number of Chicano defense funds and to lend some immediate help to the victims.

It would be well to note that the most repressive section of the Immigration and Naturalization Act having to do with political deportation was cancelled out through the defense of a Chicano deportee, José María Gastelum, and the Supreme Court decision in his case made judicial history.

The defense funds throughout the Southwest are extremely weak, however, and one of the key efforts in the coming years is the maintenance and development of these funds, because the attacks and harassment by all levels of government are certain to increase in proportion to the increased militancy of the Chicano movement. The fact that the Government needs all of the resources at its command to suppress the movement of the Chicano people is evidenced by the relentless and brutal persecution of Reies Lopez Tijerina, who faces multiple sentences on the same charge that amount to life in prison.

In the overall movement the party faces a number of important ideological tasks. First, we must impress on the

mass movement the potentially strong alliance which the Mexican people can provide, and we must impress on the mass movement the understanding that the Mexican people as a conquered people in the heartland of their conquerors are a direct challenge to American imperialism throughout the continent. The Mexican people have direct ties of culture and race with Mexico and with all of Latin America. We must bring to the mass movement the understanding that we must take special responsibility for the defeat of imperialism which maintains Mexico and Latin America in such a desperate economic situation. One of the most brutal expressions of American imperialism is the continued boycott of Cuba. We must do much more in the struggle to end the boycott of Cuba, which not only involves a boycott by the U.S. but is an organized boycott by every country that is dominated by the U.S. on this matter. It has succeeded in isolating Cuba from the continent as a whole and has created tremendous hardships.

Second, in connection with Cuba, we must see Cuba for what it represents in the struggle against imperialism. Cuba, as the Mexican-Americans can see, is developing the living alternative to the imperialist exploitation that affects them and the rest of the continent. A number of Mexican-Americans, especially youth leaders, have travelled to Cuba in recent years and have a strong identity with the developing socialist economy in the Western Hemisphere. Cuba is the one Revolution that has been able to say "Cuba Sí, Yanqui No" and make it stick.

Third, we must recognize the continuing struggle for representation within the body politic as a struggle of a doubly oppressed section of the working class for an expression of its immediate demands.

Fourth, we must bring into the mass movement the most advanced demands possible, and not be content with the minimum demands developed by the movement. As a case in point, in the struggle of the farm workers we must

develop not the cry for the lousy Landrum-Griffin Act, but the cry for a Bill of Rights for the farm workers that will make up for the years of special oppression suffered by this section of the class.

Fifth, we must develop in the consciousness of the Blacks and the Mexican people a unity in the common struggle which they are conducting for national liberation. While the Blacks and the Mexican people have everything in common in terms of their ultimate objectives which are involved in national liberation, there are great dangers that in the interim, serious rifts might develop between these two sections of the working class. The lack of training and education and the miseducation that has been suffered by the Mexican, Black and Puerto Rican people has created the potential for them to engage in deadly struggle over the diminishing semi-skilled and unskilled jobs being automated out of existence. We must prevent this potential competition by developing national joint Black and Mexican struggles for retraining at full wages for all people discharged from automated jobs. We must explore and deepen the unity of the Indian, the Mexican, the Black and Latin American people, and we should call for a Hemispheric Conference of national liberation to chart the way for a continental destruction of American imperialism.

To implement these demands our own organization must conduct a deep study of the national question and of self-determination as it applies to the Mexican people, Indians, Black people, and to all national minorities, as envisaged by Lenin. We must put forth a slogan of self-determination of destiny for the Mexican movement, to stay with the tempo and the mood of that movement today. The character of the self-determination, as Lenin ably pointed out, is determined by the historical conditions when socialism is established.

The type of study and dialogue that is required inside our party must be a nationwide effort, with all sections

completely involved. This is the type of concentration that we were able to develop around what we used to call the "Negro Question" in the '40s and '50s, and the result of those discussions was that we were able to produce significant ideological contributions to the Black liberation movement as a whole.

Our approach to the Mexican people in the United States must be an internationalist approach, taking into account the fact that the section of the Mexican people in the United States is but a historical expression of the development of the Mexican nation, and the development of the American continents North and South. With this view we must undertake joint solutions and perspectives with the parties of Mexico and Cuba, and indeed, with the parties from throughout the Western Hemisphere.

We should arrange party delegations to hold initial fraternal conferences with the parties of Mexico and Cuba, and take the necessary steps to insure participation of Chicano comrades in such discussions.

We should urge the fraternal parties in the socialist countries of Europe and Asia to invite activists, not necessarily party members, to visit the lands of socialism where it is a living reality, so that the socialist alternative will become more and more a part of the thinking of the movement.

Our press should, of course, reflect our increased interest in the Mexican community. On this score the People's World, published in the heartland of the Chicano movement and the farm labor struggle, has during recent years begun to reflect the scope of these movements. In the recent past the Daily World has also begun to reflect the varied militant struggles of the Chicanos. Motions adopted by the last convention of our party should provide the framework for even further improving the coverage of Chicano activities in the press we influence.

All of the other motions adopted by the last convention must be implemented. The motion that our party

greet Mexico on the occasion of El 5 de Mayo, for example, which was not implemented last year, can be applied this year, and we should salute not only the people as a whole but particularly the students and the peasants who are keeping alive the spirit of the Mexican revolution.

I propose that a national commission to coordinate and help implement the work of the party in the Mexican community be established, and that care be taken to see that the commission should not be regional in its composition. The commission should be composed, also, not only of Mexican comrades, but should include representatives from the trade union field, the youth, and the Black and Indian communities, as well as from our press.

Finally, the whole strategy of our party should be a strategy that commits us to active and immediate support for all of the immediate needs of the Mexican people, while we indicate that none of the basic problems and contradictions facing them under this system will be solved until the party and the masses together finally abolish the system and move to the construction of a socialist America.

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